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ABSTRACT

The resource paper for regular and special teachers of learning disabled students on cooperative initiatives between regular and special education is presented in a question and answer format. The following questions are discussed: How can I recognize children with learning disabilities in my classroom? If I suspect a student to have a learning disability what records should I keep to aid in making a proper referral? How do I know if the material I am using in my classroom is too difficult for my learning disabled student? What role must I play as a resource teacher in supporting teachers who serve learning disabled students in regular classrooms? How important is effective communication for a resource teacher? How can I, as a regular educator, help to implement the IEP (Individualized Education Plan) on a daily basis in my classroom? What adjustments can I make in an effort to aid learning disabled children in my regular classroom? Should I change my teaching methods in dealing with learning disabled children in my regular classroom? How can teachers find "extra time" for cooperative planning? How can secondary educators prepare learning disabled students for college? What problems do the learning disabled encounter in making social adjustments? (DB)

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A RESOURCE PAPER
FOR THE
REGULAR AND SPECIAL EDUCATOR
OF
LEARNING DISABLED STUDENTS

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Introduction

Educational opportunity in the least restrictive environment for handicapped students continues to be a major issue nationally as well as in South Carolina. A mass return of our learning disabled students to the regular educational environment may be typically what comes to one's mind when relating to least restrictive environment. Removal of handicapped children from the regular education environment shall occur only when the nature or severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. To the maximum extent appropriate all handicapped children, shall be educated with children who are not handicapped. Education of handicapped children in the least restrictive environment is determined on an annual basis through the IEP process. The Association For Children With Learning Disabilities, Inc. has always contended that educational programs for learning disabled students would be more effective if regular education and special education were integrated in their approach to planning and administering programs.

In the provision of quality educational programs, in a least restrictive environment, one realizes the importance of proper communication and cooperation among regular and special educators. This resource paper is devoted to questions and answers relative to a regular education/special education initiative. Hopefully, the information within will be useful to all teachers who deal with instruction of learning disabled students on a daily basis.

Questions and Answers
for the
Regular and Special Educator
of
Learning Disabled Students

How can I recognize children with learning disabilities in my classroom?

There is no simple set of traits that characterize children with specific learning disabilities. The common characteristic shared by specific learning disabled students is their difficulty in academic learning and their uneven performance across a variety of tasks. By definition, the common trait of SLD students is a discrepancy between measured ability and achievement.

Several authors (Mercer, Myers, Hamill) have pointed out that many characteristics of learning disabled students are also evident in the non-handicapped population. Therefore, it is important to remember that the frequency, intensity, and duration of these difficulties along with their adverse effect on the acquisition of basic skills are the major criteria that distinguish SLD students from their non-handicapped peers.

The following checklists show the common characteristics of learning disabled students as identified in the literature. A particular SLD student, in all probability, will not show all of these characteristics, but he or she will demonstrate a cluster of them. This clustering will invariably illustrate discrepant behaviors and uneven performances across academic areas.

The purpose of these checklists is to assist special educators and regular classroom teachers in identifying students who are suspected to have a specific learning disability and who may need to be referred for a comprehensive evaluation.

Oral Expression:

These students have difficulty using spoken language as an effective means of communication, even though they may comprehend it well.

The student	Consistently Presents This Characteristic	Sometimes Presents This Characteristic	Not A Problem	Not Observed
1. Speaks in single word statements only.				
2. Speaks in phrases only.				
3. Exhibits word retrieval problems.				
4. Exhibits bizarre patterns of language usage.				
5. Imitates or repeats words incorrectly.				
6. Uses gestures to substitute for words.				
7. Has difficulty relating ideas in sequence.				
8. Has difficulty making self understood by other students.				
9. Contributes to class discussions with off-task comments.				
10. Shows reluctance in describing experiences or telling short stories.				
11. Confuses words (i.e. profane/propane, prescription/subscription).				
12. Substitutes other words for words he/she is having trouble retrieving (circumlocution).				

Vermont State Department of Education, Procedures for the Identification of Children with Specific Learning Disabilities, 1984.

Written Expression

Written expression deficiencies may involve handwriting problems (i.e. spacing and letter formation, spelling difficulties) and/or any of the difficulties encountered in narrative writing, organization of thoughts, choice of vocabulary, logical conclusions, etc.

The student	Consistently Presents This Characteristic	Sometimes Presents This Characteristic	Not A Problem	Not Observed
1. Has difficulty holding pencil in correct alignment to paper.				
2. Has difficulty producing written work which is legible, properly spaced, capitalized, punctuated.				
3. Uses extra effort to write.				
4. Misspells words phonetically (ruf for rough).				
5. Misspells high frequency sight words.				
6. Makes spellings unrelated to sounds of words.				
7. Confuses homonyms.				
8. Fails to retain spelling words studied in lists.				
9. Has difficulty expressing a complete thought in a sentence.				
10. Has difficulty expressing a complete thought in a paragraph.				
11. Mixes manuscript and cursive forms.				
12. Uses mature thought units (compound sentences, complex sentences, etc.) but does not apply punctuation, capitalization, grammer rules.				
13. Has difficulty sequencing thoughts in a narrative.				

Vermont State Department of Education, Procedures for the Identification of Children with Specific Learning Disabilities, 1984.

Basic Reading Skills

Students with these deficiencies usually encounter problems in word analysis and word recognition. Word analysis problems may be evident in recognition of word configurations, visual memory of letter sequences, phonic analysis, and use of context cues.

The student	Consistently Presents This Characteristic	Sometimes Presents This Characteristic	Not A Problem	Not Observed
1. Avoids reading.				
2. Changes behavior when asked to read silently.				
3. Changes behavior when asked to read orally.				
4. Has difficulty matching letters.				
5. Guesses words from initial letters.				
6. Guesses words from pictorial cues.				
7. Guesses words from context cues.				
8. Has difficulty sounding out vowels correctly.				
9. Has difficulty sounding out consonants correctly.				
10. Has difficulty sounding out words correctly.				
11. Blends sounds incorrectly.				
12. Has difficulty with sight vocabulary.				
13. Skips lines.				
14. Moves head when reading.				
15. Moves lips when reading.				
16. Uses finger to anchor self when reading.				
17. Reads high frequency sight words incorrectly (the, and, but).				
18. Reads word-by-word.				
19. Does not observe small differences between words (plurals, verb-endings, possessives) when reading.				

Vermont State Department of Education, Procedures for the Identification of Children with Specific Learning Disabilities, 1984.

Reading Comprehension:

Specific comprehension deficits affect literal comprehension, interpretive comprehension or critical comprehension. The SLD student may find if particularly difficult to infer, draw conclusions, or identify the main idea in various written materials. These students frequently are unable to answer questions about material just read.

The student	Consistently Presents This Characteristic	Sometimes Presents This Characteristic	Not A Problem	Not Observed
1. Has difficulty reading and following directions.				
2. Has difficulty answering questions after reading.				
3. Has difficulty reading and completing math story problems.				
4. Has difficulty understanding main idea of a passage.				
5. Has difficulty understanding subordinate ideas of a passage.				
6. Has difficulty drawing conclusions from a passage.				
7. Has difficulty making inferences from a passage.				
8. Has difficulty recalling sequences of written information.				
9. Has difficulty using content cues to guess at unknown word.				
10. Has difficulty reading independently.				

Vermont State Department of Education, Procedures for the Identification of Children with Specific Learning Disabilities, 1984.

Listening Comprehension:

Students with deficits in listening comprehension do not comprehend spoken language efficiently.

The student	Consistently Presents This Characteristic	Sometimes Presents This Characteristic	Not A Problem	Not Observed
1. Asks that statements be repeated.				
2. Often says "what?", "huh", etc.				
3. Confuses the meanings of similar sounding words.				
4. Fails to follow directions given verbally.				
5. Does the opposite of the teacher's instructions.				
6. Has difficulty understanding common vocabulary words.				
7. Has difficulty listening attentively to stories, television shows, records.				
8. Has difficulty locating the direction of sounds.				
9. Answers questions inappropriately.				
10. Confuses direction words (front/back, upon/over).				
11. Confuses time concepts (before/after).				
12. Asks irrelevant questions after hearing a story.				
13. Shows increased difficulty in any of the above areas when classroom noise increases.				

Vermont State Department of Education, Procedures for the Identification of Children with Specific Learning Disabilities, 1984.

Mathematics Reasoning:

The analysis of various mathematical word problems is difficult for SLD students who have poor reasoning and analysis skills. The sequencing of steps required to solve a problem can be especially confusing.

The student	Consistently Presents This Characteristic	Sometimes Presents This Characteristic	Not A Problem	Not Observed
1. Has difficulty applying math operations to real life problems.				
2. Has difficulty understanding math concepts such as more/less.				
3. Has difficulty understanding basic time concepts.				
4. Has difficulty using calendar correctly.				
5. Has difficutly naming months of the year.				
6. Has difficulty telling time.				
7. Has difficulty using money terms correctly (penny, dime).				
8. Has difficulty making change correctly.				
9. Has difficulty using basic measurements correctly (inches, feet).				
10. Has difficulty using tables and graphs.				
11. Guesses at answers instead of trying to solve problems.				
12. Has difficulty differentiating between essential and non-essential information in solving problems.				
13. Has difficulty solving problems involving a sequence of steps.				

Vermont State Department of Education, Procedures for the Identification of Children with Specific Learning Disabilities, 1984.

Mathematics Calculation:

These students have problems with the fundamental operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, and with rote memorization tasks. They confuse mathematical symbols and fail to grasp number relationships. The SLD student may also reverse or mix numbers and sets of numbers. These students often find it difficult to recall the proper sequences of steps to be followed in performing various mathematical operations.

The student	Consistently Presents This Characteristic	Sometimes Presents This Characteristic	Not A Problem	Not Observed
1. Has difficulty understanding one-to-one correspondence.				
2. Has difficulty completing addition with one digit numbers.				
3. Has difficulty completing addition with two or more digits.				
4. Has difficulty completing addition and carrying.				
5. Has difficulty completing subtraction with one digit numbers.				
6. Has difficulty completing subtraction with two or more digits.				
7. Has difficulty completing subtraction with borrowing.				
8. Has difficulty completing multiplication with one digit numbers.				
9. Has difficulty completing multiplication with two or more digits.				
10. Confuses operational signs.				
11. Uses fingers for computation.				
12. Reverses numbers.				
13. Has difficulty keeping columns straight.				
14. Has difficulty with place values.				
15. Has difficulty completing problems involving more than one operation.				
16. Has difficulty estimating answers.				
17. Completes problems in his/her head yet unable to put on paper.				

Vermont State Department of Education, Procedures for the Identification of Children with Specific Learning Disabilities, 1984.

NOTE: Although the next three areas are not specified as performance areas in state or federal regulations, the characteristics listed have been noted in the literature as difficulties that affect the SLD student's acquisition of basic skills.

Attentional Skills:

The SLD student who is distractible may have a short attention span, be unable to filter out irrelevant and inappropriate auditory and visual stimuli, and thereby fail to focus their attention on a specific task.

The student	Consistently Presents This Characteristic	Sometimes Presents This Characteristic	Not A Problem	Not Observed
1. Fails to "finish".				
2. Appears not to listen.				
3. Seems easily distracted.				
4. Has difficulty concentrating on schoolwork or other tasks requiring sustained attention.				
5. Has difficulty sticking to play activity.				
6. Appears to act before thinking.				
7. Shifts excessively from one activity to another.				
8. Has difficulty organizing work (not due to cognitive impairment).				
9. Frequently calls out in class.				
10. Has difficulty awaiting turn in games.				
11. Runs about or climbs on things excessively.				
12. Has difficulty sitting still or fidgets excessively.				
13. Has difficulty staying seated.				
14. Appears to be always "on the go"; "driven by a motor".				
15. Appears not just "over-active", but haphazard, poorly organized, non-goal directed.				

NOTE: The above characteristics should be overriding, obvious and pervasive. Children from disorganized or chaotic environments may appear to have attention difficulties as well as non-goal directed behavior.

Vermont State Department of Education, Procedures for the Identification of Children with Specific Learning Disabilities, 1984.

Learning Strategies:

It has become increasingly apparent the SLD students are deficient in general learning strategies (Alley, Warner, Schumaker, 1981; Loper, 1981). They do not use the skills of self-questioning, self-testing, self-monitoring, analyzing and scanning one's repertoire for different and appropriate problem solving approaches.

The student	Consistently Presents This Characteristic	Sometimes Presents This Characteristic	Not A Problem	Not Observed
1. Is unable to detect errors that he/she makes in composition writing.				
2. Is unable to apply appropriate test taking skills across subject areas; i.e., does not thoroughly read instructions, review the entire test before responding, checking answers, does not recognize "give away" questions, or obvious answers, or chooses an answer that is obviously wrong.				
3. Is unable to use rules specific to mathematics.				
4. Is unable to review materials; i.e., does not re-read assigned materials.				
5. Is unable to summarize information; i.e., cannot identify main points and important facts for a selection in two or three sentences.				
6. Is unable to allot a reasonable amount of study time; i.e., does not use study time appropriately in class.				
7. Is unable to apply questioning skills,asks inappropriate questions to the discussion or content topic, or does not ask questions during the class period.				
8. Is unable to outline — take notes on material-in-class notes are sketchy and much doodling evident.				
9. Is unable to structure materials into a logical sequence — cannot organize two or more sources of information into idea or logic.				

Vermont State Department of Education, Procedures for the Identification of Children with Specific Learning Disabilities, 1984.

The student	Consistently Presents This Characteristic	Sometimes Presents This Characteristic	Not A Problem	Not Observed
10. Is unable to survey material before studying in depth, does not scan for major points before reading material intensively.				
11. Does not use memory aids (verbal, rehearsal, study guides).				
12. Is unable to organize work space.				

Social Perception:

Learning disabled students often misread social interaction cues for symbols. They may misinterpret body language, facial expression, figures of speech, and overtures for friendship, a trait that can subject them to ridicule from peers. This may lead to inappropriate behavior and emotional control. Some SLD students act impulsively. They may have difficulty transferring social skills they have learned to a different social situation. Social perception deficits are particularly noted as students approach adolescence.

The student	Consistently Presents This Characteristic	Sometimes Presents This Characteristic	Not A Problem	Not Observed
1. Makes inappropriate comments.				
2. Makes inappropriate use of personal space.				
3. Has difficulty in anticipating behavior of others.				
4. Has difficulty in changing behavior problems.				
5. Appears to be inflexible.				
6. Tends towards impulsive decisions or judgements.				
7. Has difficulty comprehending subtle meaning (i.e., jokes, puns)				
8. Has difficulty responding to non-verbal cues, hand gestures, facial expressions, etc.				

Vermont State Department of Education, Procedures for the Identification of Children with Specific Learning Disabilities, 1984.

If I suspect a student to have a learning disability what records should I keep to aid in making a proper referral?

Few teachers are prepared in training programs in such a manner as to adequately solve each kind of problem which is encountered in schools on their own. What is needed is training that will give teachers the skills to detect actual or potential problems, determine whether the solutions to the problems are within their professional competency, and, if not, permit the referral of the problem for help or solution. (Reynolds, 1979, p. 17) Direct observation and recording of student behavior is likely to be the most objective and useful approach to keeping good records. It is very important that the teacher routinely and systematically observes how students are functioning in the regular classroom setting.

The following form is an example of how a regular educator may monitor a particular student suspected of having a learning disability.

Classroom Teacher Referral

Student _____ D.O.B. _____ Age _____

Grade _____ Retained yes/no grade _____

Classroom Teacher _____

Reason for concern _____

1. Strategies.

   Are there any particular strategies you have already used with this student? If yes, briefly describe and indicate their effectiveness.

2. Classroom Schedule. Briefly list your daily schedule.

   A.M. _____ P.M. _____

3. Classroom Structure.

   a. **Teaching style** — briefly describe the way you teach; i.e., structured, unstructured, etc.

   b. **Classroom layout** — briefly describe how your classroom is laid out.

   c. **Behavior management** — describe how you manage behavior in your classroom.

d. **Oral vs. written work** — What is the approximate percentage required in your class?

_____ oral _____ written

4. **Curriculum.**

Does your classroom program reflect your school's curriculum for your grade?

_____

_____

List the text used:

Reading _____

Math _____

Language Arts _____

Spelling _____

Science/Social Studies _____

5. **Student Information.**

a. Has the student demonstrated that he/she has the vocabulary to understand your directions? yes/no If no, give examples of difficulties.

_____

_____

_____

b. Has the student experienced difficulty with the vocabulary of content area work? no/yes If yes, provide examples.

_____

_____

_____

c. In your opinion, is this child's language ability equal to that of his classmates? If no, please give examples of areas of difficulty; e.g., understanding what is said, expressing himself/herself.

_____

_____

_____

d. Have you observed any ways in which this student has learned to compensate for his/her learning difficulties? If yes, please explain.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

e. Does this student have difficulties with study skills; e.g., completing homework, notetaking, test taking skills? yes/no If yes, please explain

_____

_____

_____

f. Does the student exhibit difficulty in reading; i.e., word attack skills, literal and/or interpretive comprehension skills?

_____

_____

_____

_____

g. In the area of mathematics, does the student exhibit difficulty with calculations or problem solving?

_____

_____

_____

h. In written expression, does the student exhibit difficulty with spelling, punctuation, writing in complete sentences, organizing a paragraph?

_____

_____

_____

i. Compare this student's behavior with that of his classmates.

_____

_____

_____

j. Would you describe this student as a self-starter or as one who needs a lot of direction and supervision to accurately complete tasks?

_____

_____

_____

k. In which setting does this student function best?

Large group _____ Small _____ One to one _____

l. In your opinion, what is this student's best learning modality?

_____ auditory _____ visual _____ auditory & visual _____ multi-sensory

m. Check the appropriate description of this student's peer relations.

_____ well-liked by all _____ has a small group of friends _____ is a loner

6. **Please attach a sample(s) of the student's written work that reflects your area of concern about him/her.**

How do I know if the material I am using in my classroom is too difficult for my learning disabled students?

You may wish to use the following textbook analysis form to determine whether certain material is too difficult for particular students in your classroom. Based on the information you collect, attempt to develop hypotheses to answer your questions relative to the language skills previously mastered by the student.

Textbook Analysis

Student _____ Test _____

Teacher _____ Publisher _____

Grade _____ Level _____

Date _____ Readability Level _____

The following are questions to be considered when analyzing a student's textbook.

1. **Pace of the Book**

   Consider the following:

   A. On the average, how many new concepts are introduced in each chapter?

   _____

   _____

   B. Is there adequate opportunity to apply and practice concepts presented in the chapter?

   _____

   _____

2. **Format of the Book**

   Consider the following:

   A. What is the average sentence length?

   _____

   _____

   B. Are important words, phrases and concepts highlighted?

   _____

   _____

   C. Are questions interspersed throughout the chapter or do they all come at the end of the chapter?

   _____

   _____

   D. Are cue words or phrases found in the margins of the text?

   _____

   _____

   E. Are visual aids, i.e., pictures, graphs, charts used to illustrate concepts?

   _____

   _____

   F. Is the size of the print unusually small?

   _____

   _____

3. **Language Demands of the Book**

Consider the following:

A. Does the format introduce new vocabulary as the first activity of a new chapter?

_____

_____

B. Are there basic vocabulary concepts that are necessary pre-requisites to working in this text? (See teacher's manual of previous level text).

_____

_____

C. Are written directions given in an easy to understand manner?

_____

_____

D. Do written directions and/or questions require prior student mastery of functional words? i.e., underline, circle, compare, contrast.

_____

_____

E. Does the suggested teacher language found in the teacher manual require prior student mastery of certain concepts and vocabulary words?

_____

_____

F. What are the language skills necessary for the student to use this text?

syntactic construction: _____

_____

idioms: _____

_____

morphemes: _____

_____

Based on information collected to date (teacher referral, teacher interview, classroom observation, record review and the textbook analysis) formulate possible hypotheses regarding the student's language skills as they relate to the language requirements of the textbook.

e.g., Student will have difficulty with this text because it requires knowledge of concepts not yet mastered and it contains complex directions with imbeded clauses which student cannot handle.

What role must I play as a resource teacher in supporting teachers who serve learning disabled students in regular classrooms?

Although all professionals working with children need support, those mildly handicapped children being returned to the regular class, or already in regular classes, require some special support. This specialized support is usually the responsibility of a team of people within the school (an Assessment Team) and, in particular, the resource teacher. The resource teacher is most often a credentialed teacher of special education with prior full-time teaching experience, whose major skills are in the area of educational and behavioral assessment, individualized remediation, and development of educational plans. In addition, the resource teacher must be adept at establishing rapport and stimulating cooperation among other professionals. Some responsibilities of the resource teacher include:

Providing assessment and instructional planning services to handicapped children in the regular classes.

Conducting remedial instruction of handicapped children for regularly scheduled periods of time.

Providing consultative services to regular teachers and parents.

Participating with the school-based assessment team to coordinate services to exceptional students.

A part of the resource teacher's function consists of direct service to identified children via actual remedial instruction for specified time periods. Another portion of the role involves indirect service via teacher consultation, inservice, and coordination of educational services. It is our bias that the provision of indirect services is the more expedient and effective method of bringing about change in the quality of education for most mildly learning disabled children. The more that the resource teacher's role is designed to offer real support to the classroom teacher, the more change is likely to occur.

Some teachers lack the necessary information and skills to cope with difficult-to-teach children. Teacher training programs may fail to provide sufficient

expertise in basic assessment procedures, diagnostic/prescriptive techniques, and remedial materials and methods. Resource teachers must have expertise in these areas and help and encourage other teachers to acquire them. The end goal must be for regular teachers to take over responsibility for a great deal of the assessment and planning process for both normal and mildly handicapped children. This goal cannot be accomplished with the resource teacher spending a majority of his/her time in an isolated room working with children who have been "pulled-out" of the regular classroom, even for short periods of time. Only a teacher can make and maintain changes in the classroom; others may help but cannot do so unless the teacher himself/herself desires a change. A teacher-initiated referral is, in itself, an indication that the teacher desires help and may be open to change. Emphasis then must be placed upon establishing an open, honest communication with teachers who are ultimately responsible for implementing the individual child's program.

> Regular classroom teachers must become actively involved in providing special education since educational change can take place only if teachers implement effective programs. They also must become child advocates to ensure that these programs result in expanded opportunities for children to live more meaningful and purposeful lives. (Egner & Paolucci, 1974)

Some general competencies widely accepted as necessary for successful performance as resource teachers include:

> Expertise in informal assessment procedures and techniques including observation.
>
> Knowledge and understanding of the dynamics of learning and remediation of specific school problems.
>
> Expertise in design and implementation of instructional plans.
>
> Knowledge of a wide variety of remedial and developmental instructional approaches.
>
> Acquaintance with a wide variety of instrucional materials.
>
> Knowledge of application of behavior management techniques.

More specific skills include:

> Writing objectives.

Developing criterion-referenced tests.

Task analysis.

Pinpointing target behaviors.

Developing behavior-change programs.

Selection and application of observation procedures.

Adaptation of instructional programs and materials.

There are some critically important personality characteristics and attitudes that enable one to function successfully in the role of a resource teacher. A resource teacher

Must accept and value handicapped children as people. This is crucial in dealing with regular teachers' (and others') stereotypes and feelings and in making efforts toward achieving empathy.

Must possess the interpersonal skills which facilitate joint problem solving and stimulate sharing of skills and resources.

Must respect the confidentiality of records and use good judgment in handling information related to individual child cases.

Should be "hungry for change."

Should have a high energy level.

Must be able to face problems directly.

Must be politically sensitive; aware of formal and informal power structures.

Must possess a strong personal and professional commitment to the needs of children.

Must have a self-directed attitude, including acceptance of the necessity for record keeping and accountability requirements.

Must possess an understanding of some basic techniques that can be used in successful inservice training.

How important is effective communication for a resource teacher?

A major part of the resource teacher's role involves consultation and communication with regular teachers and other professionals directly involved with planning and implementing programs for children. Good consulting depends on effective communication, and there are some important points to consider in order to sharpen skills in communicating with others. As a consultant, trainer, and teacher, it is important to work on increasing

our ability to send clear messages that cannot be misinterpreted by the receiver, and increasing our ability to listen carefully so that further communication will occur.

Worell and Nelson (1974) suggest three steps and include some tips for increasing effective communication with children. Their points apply equally as well to adults.

> **Establish trust**--try to convey an attitude of acceptance and respect; let others know that you will not talk about them to others or betray confidences; don't be a phony; make sure your words match your actions--don't say one thing, and do another; be real, admit your mistakes and that you don't have all the answers.
>
> **Send clear messages**--be specific; make sure your non-verbal behavior matches your verbal--for example, giving a compliment while staring out the window transmits two different messages.
>
> **Listen actively**--active listening means:
>
> > Giving undivided attention.
> >
> > Waiting until the speaker's thought is completed before you begin talking.
> >
> > Thinking about what the speaker's message really means (decoding).
> >
> > Indicating when you understand what the speaker is saying via eye contact, nods, verbal statements of agreement, and questions to clarify meaning.

Jung, Howard, Emory, and Pino (1972) outline some additional techniques and tips for facilitating interpersonal communications:

Paraphrasing is any means of showing the other person what his statement means to you and can be used to make sure you understand what another person is trying to communicate. Repeat in your own words what the speaker has said to you. Do not assume you understand what the speaker intended.

Behavior description is "reporting specific, observable actions of others without placing a value on them as right or wrong, bad or good, and without making accusations or generalizations about the other's motives, attitudes or personality traits". Not "Jim, you are rude," but "Jim, you've talked more than others on this topic."

Feelings--communicate your feelings to others accurately--that way nonverbal and verbal expressions will not be misinterpreted. We need to let others understand how we feel and try to understand other people's emotional reactions. One way to do this is to practice identifying or naming feelings. Try making statements, such as "I feel embarrassed," instead of blushing or "I feel pleased," instead of saying nothing, or "I am worried about this," instead of becoming suddenly silent.

Perception check is a check to see if you understand another's feelings accurately. It conveys that you want to understand what another is feeling. This involves attempting to describe another's feelings by saying, "I get the impression you are angry with me?" Always describe feelings, never express disapproval or approval, such as "Why are you so angry?"

In summary, a resource teacher must successfully combine two major sets of skills; skill in assessment and instructional planning for handicapped students and communication/consultation skills. The resource teacher needs skills to work directly with students but, at the same time, needs skills in broader indirect helping processes. A resource teacher must combine direct and indirect service skills in order to meet the needs of students and to respond to the abilities and personalities of each teacher. A resource teacher must manage a greater variety of relationships--child, teacher, and total staff.

Support Strategies

Be flexible and be a problem-solver. There will never be a single process that solves all problems, although we are forever searching for one. Expect change and a wide variety of skills and interests and adapt! (Hammill and Bartel, 1975)

"Support" can be many things, from demonstration of a particular technique or materials for an individual teacher, to providing inservice for a group of teachers. In this section we will concentrate on tips and techniques for use as a consultant in a one-to-one situation.

Some General Tips to Establish Rapport

Be aware of the key people in the system and look for allies or potential allies; first seek out those teachers who are most open to change and new ideas.

Practice "good politics"--this includes an attitude of friendliness by making eye contact. Make it a habit to look for something positive about the teacher, the room, and so on, and say so.

Do something early that will be perceived as helpful or useful, such as distributing a useful article, pamphlet, lesson plan, or technique.

Be a good listener. Demonstrate this by nodding if you understand, and asking questions if you don't.

Establish realistic expectations--don't set yourself up as a "miracle worker"--don't oversell yourself.

Don't set expectations too low. Build your own knowledge and help teachers to see and experience the benefits of change.

Do all you can to minimize the perception of threat. Build an open relationship based on two-way communication and sharing of ideas and solutions. Admit you don't know all the answers.

As a Consultant

Consulting is the procedure through which teachers, parents, principals, and other adults significant in the life of the child communicate. Consultation involves sharing information and ideas, coordinating, comparing observations, providing a sounding board, and developing tentative hypotheses for action. In contrast to the superior-inferior relationship involved in some consultation with specialists, emphasis is placed on joint planning and collaboration. The purpose is to develop tentative recommendations which fit the uniqueness of the child, the teacher, and the setting (Dinkmeyer, 1968).

Savage (1959) has identified three types of consultants:

The Expert--Directs his efforts at arriving at the right answer for a particular problem in a particular situation.

The Resource--Directs his efforts toward providing an abundance of information so that the persons can have a choice of a wide range of alternative pragmatic solutions to the problem.

The Process Person--Directs efforts toward developing a method of working with all persons concerned which will bring about behavioral changes and these changes will enable them to solve their own problems and become

competent in handling similar problems in the future. A consultant who leans toward being "the process person" probably has a better chance of actually facilitating some lasting change.

As a resource teacher/consultant your major functions will be to help teachers to: (a) Recognize and define needs, (b) Diagnose problems and set objectives, (c) Acquire relevant resources, (d) Design solutions, (e) Implement solutions, (f) Evaluate solutions.

Most people have trouble both asking for and giving help. Success in this area demands special skills in communicating and building relationships. Two-way communication must occur before "helping" can be relevant. As a consultant you must actively listen to the teacher's problem and hear what has already been tried. Without open-knowledge sharing, you will never know just how much help you can be. If you appear to be evaluating or judging, you will generate defensiveness. Don't give the teacher a feeling of inadequacy.

Consultation often begins with receipt of a referral. It continues with observation of the child in the classroom after referral. It may be necessary to help the teacher articulate and pinpoint needs more clearly. Spend some time identifying strengths and areas of greatest potential change in both the child and the teacher. Be certain to involve the teacher in diagnosing her own problems and solutions--this cannot be overemphasized. The level of teacher participation in the decision making and planning is directly related to level of adoption later on!

The following hints have been suggested as being helpful to one in a consultative role:

Listen, hear, and understand what is being said by the regular classroom teacher.

Acknowledge openly the skills held by the regular classroom teacher.

Be cognizant of the problems faced by the regular classroom teacher.

Adjust and modify suggestions you may have to the atmosphere of this particular regular classroom.

Be honest.

Seek the exchange of ideas and suggestions.

There are some pitfalls to avoid in consultative situations.

Don't over-diagnose. Select one or two things to begin changing.

Be objective. Do not impose your own specialty on the teacher. Be sensitive to your client's personality and teaching style. Take off your blinders and widen your perspective. There is no cure-all method or material that can be applied to all teachers and students across the board.

Generate several alternate solutions--and examine how practical each is, how it fits into this particular classroom and how much time is involved to implement.

Don't overlook reinforcement for the teacher's knowledge and efforts.

How can I, as a regular educator, help to implement the IEP (Individualized Education Plan) on a daily basis in my classroom?

The development of an IEP is only the beginning of an educational process, the real test lies in the implementation of that individualized educational program. In speaking of handicapped children who are most likely to be integrated into regular classes, it will not always be easy to implement an IEP. Yet, most good teachers already have the necessary skills to teach mildly handicapped students. The regular teacher should not see this implementation through alone. One must have ongoing support from special educators. Regular teachers do not need to acquire an entire new set of teaching skills. One must refine existing skills and learn how to apply them more systematically and precisely.

Dealing with handicapped students in a regular classroom requires that the regular teacher have the five (5) following attitudes and skills.

A positive, accepting attitude toward the handicapped.

An understanding of what it takes to operate an IEP into daily classroom activities.

A knowledge of the basic principles of learning, instructional strategies, and behavior management techniques.

An understanding of how to individualize content in basic subject areas.

Skills to measure student progress on an ongoing basis.

Point number one, involving positive attitude and acceptance by the regular teacher, is rightly given a high priority on the list of five points. Points one through four will be able to be achieved much easier if the receiving teacher's attitude is positive.

There are some teachers who probably should never be asked to work with handicapped students. Our goal is a placement for the handicapped child in a least restrictive environment. Yet, to place a student in a regular classroom setting, with a teacher who has a negative attitude, would be placing that student in a very restrictive environment.

A first step would be to obtain as much information as possible about the handicapped child in the regular class. This should help to eliminate any common myths or misconceptions a teacher may have pre-conceived. The teacher should then share this new accurate information about a handicap with the entire class. Importantly, one must get to know and appreciate handicapped persons as individuals.

Following is a list of some of the basic facts that every teacher should know about learning disabled students.

Facts on LD

Most LD students grow up to develop normal social and communication skills and function well in society.

Most LD students are not identified until the academic work becomes more and more difficult.

Some LD students can function well in the regular classroom setting, others will need special support.

Do not waste time arguing about causes and labels. The key to success is getting on with instruction.

REMEMBER--A difference is only a difference when it makes a difference. Handicapped children have far more similarities than differences with non-handicapped. (Turnbull and Schultz, 1979)

Learning disabled children, in the classrooms of America, are in great need of "special help" relative to instruction. Regular classroom teachers must be aware of

the learning disabled population in their classrooms and fill the role of a "regular special educator."

The following are four points to keep in mind while instructing learning disabled students in a regular classroom setting.

MAKE IT SIMPLE

When explaining a concept to children who have auditory or language problems, make directions simple. Use very few words. Speak clearly and slowly and be sure the students are paying attention.

If a particular child has a visual or motor problem show the child what to do. Physically moving a child through a task gives them a "feel" for what they are to do.

Position yourself near a child with spatial relations problems during a task so that you can help the child to judge relationships.

An LD child who is distractable or has poor discrimination skills would function better in a classroom with reduced clutter and noise. Use materials that are clear and plain to help a child with a visual discrimination problem. Avoid materials that have difficult backgrounds or crowded pages.

MAKE IT SHORT

Most LD children find it hard to sit still and listen. They are active, easily distracted and have a difficult time with following directions. When the activity is too long, be aware of the fact that the child has had enough and will lose attention and quit trying.

KEEP IT ORGANIZED

A learning disabled child needs a structured environment, one that is well organized. Each day plan quiet times in between learning activities. It is important to discuss the day's routine with the children. It may even be helpful to post a schedule to show the order of the day's events. As you go through each event, explain what will happen next. Attempt to follow the same routine each day, so the children will be able to anticipate what activity is next.

TEACH IT

Non-handicapped children often seem to learn without actually being taught. But children with learning problems have to be taught these things that they do not learn on their own. An example would be that most children learn the concept of "top" from their environment. But learning disabled students must be taught the difference between "top" and "bottom".

As soon as you notice that a child is having learning problems in a particular area, you must try a different teaching approach, and keep trying different approaches, until you find one that is successful for that child.

Give the children lots of practice at a particular skill. Repeat the activity in as many ways as possible. When repeating an activity help the child to remember when they did it before. Point things out and describe them to the child.

In teaching don't go too fast. Teach in small amounts. Expect a little more of the children each day, constantly reminding them of their successes and encouraging them to always do their best.

In summary, these four points of instruction if followed in your classroom will not only benefit the learning disabled child, but will serve as an aid to learning for all students. The key to remember is to keep experimenting until you find a way that works. It is sadly true that most of the time, students don't fail, teachers do, in finding the proper methods to reach the student.

What adjustments can I make in an effort to aid learning disabled children in my regular classroom?

The following list represents an effort to summarize some ideas for working with LD children in a regular classroom. The list is by no means an exclusive one; teachers are encouraged to generate and try out additional ideas. Any one, or combination, of the ideas listed may be used as a basis for adjusting instruction to better meet the needs of LD students.

A. Adjust type, difficulty, amount, or sequence of material required for LD students by:

1. giving them a lesser amount than the rest of the class; ie., fewer math problems, fewer pages to read, etc.

2. breaking their assignments down into very short tasks. Many of these children do well if they are provided with short assignments followed by immediate feedback. If the LD student concentrates well for three minutes, provide him with a series of three minute tasks with a break between each. If he can do only one math problem correctly, give him one only; and after he has succeeded at that for several days, increase the number to two and so on. If he does only the first one or two questions on a page correctly, it may be that his attention is caught by all the material on the page and he would do better with a series of individual questions, each on its own page. A classmate or older student should be able to prepare this for the LD child.

3. giving them only one (or few) questions at a time during testing.

4. including in their assignments only that material which is absolutely necessary for them to learn.

5. checking or underlining for them textbook passages which contain the most important facts--using markers to tell them where to start or stop an assignment.

6. giving them specific questions to guide their reading and, if necessary, showing them the exact paragraphs where information can be found.

7. establishing only a few modest goals for LD students. Develop with them the ways you will attempt to reach those goals, the things they will have to do.

8. making certain the student's desk is free of all material except what he is working with.

10. taking up the student's work as soon as it's completed.

11. keeping the number of practice items on any skill to a minimum.

12. changing activities before the student's attention is gone; watching for early signs of attention loss.

13. giving students several alternatives in both obtaining and reporting information--tapes, interviews, reading, experience, making something, etc.

14. having frequent, even if short, one-to-one conferences with students; helping them to restate what they are responsible for and assessing their progress towards completion of work.

B. Adjust space for the LD child by:

1. permitting him to do his work in a quiet uncrowded corner of the room or even in the hall outside the room if he chooses to. However, do not isolate him against his will.

2. placing him close to the teacher for more immediate help when he needs it.

3. placing him next to a student who can help him when needed.

4. separating him from students who are most likely to distract him.

5. letting him choose the area of the room where he can concentrate best.

C. Adjust work time for the LD student by:

1. giving him a longer time than other class members to complete assignments.

2. letting him work at reading and writing assignments for short periods of time, perhaps just ten or fifteen minutes, depending on his ability to concentrate, followed by other types of activities for short periods of time.

3. setting up a specific schedule for LD students so that they know what to expect; being physically close to them if you have to change or vary their routine.

4. keeping work periods short; gradually lengthening them as the student begins to cope.

5. alternating quiet and active time; having short periods of each; making movement as purposeful as possible.

D. Adjust grouping for the LD student by:

1. matching LD Student with a peer helper who can help him by:

a. making certain he understands directions of assignments.

b. reading important directions and essential material to him.

c. drilling him orally on what he needs to know; i.e. multiplication tables, state capitals, parts of speech, etc.

d. summarizing orally important textbook passages for him.

e. writing down answers to tests and assignments for him.

f. working with him in a joint assignment.

g. criticizing his work for him, making suggestions for improvement.

2. formulate a small work group of three or four students, including one LD student. Hold all members of the group responsible for making certain that each group member completes assignments successfully.

E. Adjust presentation and evaluation modes for students.

Some of us learn better by seeing, some by listening, some by feeling, and some by a combination of approaches. Some children reinforce their weaker sensory

channel by utilizing a multisensory approach, whereas others are overloaded by this system and do better if they learn through their most functional sensory system. Find out how your LD student learns best.

1. If he is primarily an auditory learner, adjust mode of presentation for him by:

   a. giving verbal as well as written directions in assignments.

   b. taping important reading material for students to listen to as they read a passage. Tape only essential information. Keep it short! Teacher or another student might do the taping.

   c. putting assignment directions on tape so that students can replay them when needed.

   d. giving students oral rather than written tests. Teacher or another student can do this.

   e. having students drill on essential information using tape recorder, reciting information into recorder and playing it back.

   f. using published audio tapes with students.

   g. having students drill aloud to themselves or to another student.

   h. dictating information to a recorder (another student) or into a tape recorder.

   i. having another student read important information to LD students.

   j. having students read important information aloud to themselves or to another student.

   k. having students re-auditorize silently, vocalizing material inside their heads.

   l. having students repeat words aloud (or silently) while writing them down on paper to keep from leaving out words or phrases.

   m. having student close his eyes and try to hear words or information, repeating to himself in order to block out distractions.

2. If he is primarily a visual learner, adjust mode of presentation for him by:

   a. having students use flash cards printed in bold bright colors.

   b. having students close their eyes and try to visualize words or information in their heads, see things in their minds.

   c. providing visual clues on chalkboard for all verbal directions.

   d. having students write down notes and memos to themselves concerning important words, concepts, ideas.

Should I change my teaching methods in dealing with learning disabled children in my regular classroom?

Students are all different regarding the characteristics that influence learning. Therefore, a wide range of teaching methods must be used in the classroom so each child can succeed in school. We in special education have found there are as many adaptations of methods as there are learning styles. One must realize every student is capable of improvement in their learning and retention rate. Also, children with learning problems need all the help we can give them to succeed in the classroom.

The key to modality based instruction is to teach to the child's strength. If classroom instruction is designed to use the student's abilities, it is more likely that he will succeed. The three modalities that learning is based upon are visual, auditory, and kinesthetic or combinations of the three.

Some educators believe that instruction should be based upon the child's weak channels. By the time these weaknesses are strengthened, the child will only be farther behind. This situation forces the child into playing "catch-up", which the child never does.

A **combination** approach to modality instruction is most successful in the classroom. The teacher must teach to the child's strengths to insure that learning and retention is always progressing forward, while at the same time, try to remediate the child's weak channels so, in the end, the child will receive and retain information in more than one channel.

It would be an overwhelming task for a teacher to instruct each child to his own modality strength. Therefore, one must continue to present **initial instruction** to your entire class, using your modality strengths. Most students will succeed in the lesson because they can adapt their learning patterns to different modalities. After completion of this initial instruction, you must note what pupils seem not to have grasped the lesson. For these students you will want to re-teach the lesson.

This point in instruction is called the **point of intervention.** Here is where you will rely on the pupil's modality strength to re-teach your lesson. Frustration will set in if after re-teaching several times the student still does not learn or retain. You will discover whatever modality you are teaching in is not the child's strong modality. It would be wiser to try another modality, preferably the child's strong one.

The type of instruction discussed so far is used for all students, but what about those students who we realize have special needs from the very beginning? One would recommend that even the initial instruction be carried out in the child's strong modality. This will avoid frustration and not waste valuable instructional time.

The following chart may help you categorize your students into their learning styles. This may help you decipher their strong modality to plan better instruction.

See Chart on the following page.

Modality based instruction is effective because it uses the child's strengths, while not wasting time trying to solely build on a child's weaknesses. One must realize modality based instruction will not solve all of our instructional problems, but it is a valuable tool in reaching all children especially those with special needs.

OBSERVABLE CHARACTERISTICS INDICATIVE OF MODALITY STRENGTH

	Visual	Auditory	Kinesthetic
Learning Style	Learns by seeing; watching demonstrations	Learns through verbal instructions from others or self	Learns by doing, direct involvement
Reading	Likes description; sometimes stops reading to stare into space and imagine scene; intense concentration	Enjoys dialogue, plays, avoids lengthy description, unaware of illustrations; moves lips or subvocalizes	Prefers stories where action occurs early; hopes when reading, handles books; not an avid reader
Spelling	Recognizes words by sight; relies on configuration of words	Uses a phonics approach; has auditory word attack skills	Often is a poor speller; writes words to determine if they "feel" right
Handwriting	Tends to be good, particularly when young; spacing and size are good; appearance is important	Has more difficulty learning in initial stages; tends to write lightly; says strokes when writing	Good initially, deteriorates when space becomes smaller; pushes harder on writing instrument
Memory	Remembers faces, forgets names; writes things down, takes notes	Remembers names, forgets faces; remembers by auditory repetition	Remembers best what was done, not what was seen or talked about
Imagery	Vivid imagination; thinks in pictures, visualizes in detail	Subvocalizes, thinks in sounds; details less important	Imagery not important; images that do occur are accompanied by movement
Distractibility	Generally unaware of sounds; distracted by visual disorder or movement	Easily distracted by sounds	Not attentive to visual, auditory presentation so seems distractible
Problem Solving	Deliberate; plans in advance; organizes thoughts by writing them; lists problems	Talks problems out, tries solutions verbally, subvocally; talks self through problem	Attacks problems physically; impulsive; often selects solution involving greatest activity
Response to Periods of Inactivity	Stares; doodles; finds something to watch	Hums; talks to self or to others	Fidgets; finds reasons to move; holds up hand
Response to New Situations	Looks around; examines structure	Talks about situation, pros and cons, what to do	Tries things out; touches, feels; manipulates
Emotionality	Somewhat repressed; stares when angry; cries easily, beams when happy; facial expression is a good index of emotion	Shouts with joy or anger; blows up verbally but soon calms down; expresses emotion verbally and through changes in tone, volume, pitch of voice	Jumps for joy; hugs, tugs, and pulls when happy; stamps, jumps, and pounds when angry, stomps off; general body tone is a good index of emotion
Communication	Quiet; does not talk at length; becomes impatient when extensive listening is required; may use words clumsily; describes without embellishment; uses words such as *see, look*, etc.	Enjoys listening but cannot wait to talk; descriptions are long but repetitive; likes hearing self and others talk; uses words such as *listen, hear*, etc.	Gestures when speaking; does not listen well; stands close when speaking or listening; quickly loses interest in detailed verbal discourse; uses words such as *get, take*, etc.
General Appearance	Neat, meticulous, likes order; may choose not to vary appearance	Matching clothes not so important, can explain choices of clothes	Neat but soon becomes wrinkled through activity
Response to the Arts	Not particularly responsive to music; prefers the visual arts; tends not to voice appreciation of art of any kind, but can be deeply affected by visual displays; focuses on details and components rather than the work as a whole	Favors music; finds less appeal in visual art, but is readily able to discuss it; misses significant detail, but appreciates the work as a whole; is able to develop verbal association for all art forms; spends more time talking about pieces than looking at them	Responds to music by physical movement; prefers sculpture; touches statues and paintings; at exhibits stops only at those in which he or she can become physically involved; comments very little on any art form.

How can teachers find "extra time" for cooperative planning?

Perhaps the most common concern voiced by teachers about cooperative planning is, "We can't find the time to do it." While the practical limitations are not to be minimized, it is important to pursue every possible option, since cooperative planning is crucial to the success of maintaining the LD student in the regular classroom. The following are some options for coopertive planning:

Most cooperative planning takes place during planning periods, study halls, lunch periods, and before and after school. To make the most efficient use of this limited time, have specific questions carefully prepared and materials well organized before the session begins. Parkinson's Law, "Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion," seems most applicable to cooperative planning. In other words, if we allot one hour for a session, planning will probably take that much time. On the other hand, in a well-planned, twenty-minute session teachers can often accomplish the same amount.

In addition to standard times for planning, the learning disabilities teacher should seek out short periods of time during the day that are convenient to the schedules of both teachers. For example, the learning disabilities teacher could be available to the regular educator when a twenty-minute quiz or assignment is given to the class. The test or assignment can be monitored periodically while the teachers talk in the hall.

The use of a checklist on which the regular class teacher specifies possible meeting times often reveals several options not previously considered. This list should specify the amount of time needed for the meeting (remember Parkinson's Law!) and times that the learning disabilities teacher could be available. Often, teachers overlook short segments of slack time that can be put to effective use.

Finally, the use of written communication should not be overlooked in cooperative planning. It is often assumed that cooperative planning must be done orally--when this approach is taken, the options for cooperative work are greatly limited. Through the use of an NCR form (carbonless paper that produces multiple copies of communications), the teachers can keep in close contact with each other in monitoring and following up on LD students. In addition to overcoming scheduling problems, written communications provide a record of progress and decisions that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional procedures used. Some commercially prepared packages, such as the Instructional Based Appraisal System (IBAS) distributed by Edmark, Inc. (Meyen, 1976) provide highly structured communication systems to help teachers monitor student progress and facilitate communications.

How can secondary educators prepare learning disabled students for college?

There are many learning disabled students who have the potential to go to college. These students must be identified by high school teachers and counselors and then provided with the instruction and counseling needed for college preparation. What follows are recommendations for teaching and counseling learning disabled high school students who wish to go to college.

High school teachers must help learning disabled students acquire an education that is consistent with their abilities. These students must be involved in a curriculum that is commensurate with their intellectual ability, rather than a curriculum reduced to the level of their basic skills deficiencies. Following are recommendations that will help high school teachers prepare learning disabled students for college.

Enroll students in college-preparatory courses that provide the prerequisite knowledge they need to enter college courses in English, mathematics, physical sciences, and social sciences.

Provide content area instruction by teachers who have certification and training in the subjects they are teaching.

Provide assignments to students that are similar to those they will be required to complete in college.

Teach students strategies for reading textbook materials effectively and efficiently.

Teach students how to use the graphic aids that appear in their textbooks to increase their understanding of technical materials.

Teach students the major study skills that will help them to locate, organize, interpret, and retain information; to adjust their reading rates for different purposes; and to demonstrate what they have learned when taking tests.

Teach students how to organize study time and space for maximum efficiency.

Provide intensive vocabulary instruction so that learning disabled students can more effectively handle the listening and reading requirements of their courses.

Develop composition and spelling skills through daily writing assignments.

Familiarize students with the use of the auxiliary aids they will need to use in college.

Many learning disabled students have no idea what to anticipate from attending college. They often have an overinflated estimate of their abilities, unrealistic career goals, and little or no understanding of the impact of their learning disabilities. Following are recommendations that will help high school counselors prepare learning disabled students for college.

Help students to gain a realistic assessment of their potential for college.

Help students to obtain information about learning disabilities programs at various colleges.

Help students complete applications to colleges with learning disabilities programs.

Help students prepare for their college admission interviews by role-playing responses to such typically asked quesitons as these:

Why do you want to attend college?

Why do you want to attend this college?

What do your parents think about your going to college?

In what would you like to major?

What are your plans after college?

How does your learning disability affect you?

What things are easy for you to learn?

What things are difficult for you to learn?

What services or aids have helped you learn?

What help do you need from our program to succeed in college?

Are you prepared to spend extra time and effort to succeed in college?

Help students develop the interpersonal skills they need to relate to other college students.

Help students understand the ways in which their learning disabilities may make it difficult for them to succeed in college.

Help students to formulate a realistic career plan.

What problems do the learning disabled encounter in making social adjustments?

Despite the fact that most professionals agree that social adjustment problems are common among many individuals who have learning disabilities, this area has not received much attention. The focus of a learning disability is usually in a learning situation, but the consequences are rarely confined to school or work. Many areas of life are affected, including the role of the LD person in their family, relationships with friends, non-academic functioning such as sports or dancing, and certainly self-image and confidence to handle daily situations.

Some persons with learning disabilities may observe less in their social environment, misperceive more, and may not learn as easily from experience as their friends do. Some children may exhibit an immaturity and social ineptness due to their learning disability. Like many of us, learning disabled persons want acceptance, but their eagerness may cause them to try too hard in inappropriate ways.

Most children learn decorum and polite behavior not only by being taught rules but by copying their parents and others. The learning disabled child has trouble copying and does not absorb the family's behavior. Further, there are several ways of behaving in a given situation, and our "One Way Kid" cannot deal with alternatives. When he sticks to one stereotyped way, his social clumsiness makes others feel uncomfortable and irritated.

He often feels picked on and bullied, and he often is because of his awkwardness and disruptive effect on others. He can "wreck" a group activity that depends on teamwork and cooperation. He cannot wait, cannot take turns, does not understand rules, misses the point. He may dampen the group's enthusiasm, convinced that any deviation from a familiar method will not work. He may try too hard, injecting discomfort into the group by his loud laughter at jokes he does not understand, his overeagerness, his tenseness. He is forever doing too much or too little. His problem is not misbehavior, but miscalculation. Later in life, he finds out he cannot keep a job because his behavior

is inappropriate. Or perhaps he loses his job and never recognizes that the real cause was his own behavior.

Professionals working with learning disabled teenagers and adults need to teach them how to pay attention to feedback, how to recognize it, and then how to use it. Socialization for many severely learning disabled youngsters has to be taught step by step, just as the tasks in reading and math are broken down and accomplished one step at a time.

Tina was thought to be a most unfriendly young lady. She brusquely pushed past adults she met in the hallway at school, and she was barely civil to her parents' friends at home. She felt as unliked by grown-ups as she did by her classmates. Her parents wondered why Tina couldn't see what she was doing and observe what impact her behavior had on other people. They talked to her endlessly about his, but to no avail. Fortunately she was one of a small group of teenaged girls at school who were invited to take a grooming class. In fact, the class was designed explicitly to teach teenagers like Tina how to behave appropriately.

The teacher of the class asked one of the students to play the role of the hostess. The teacher then played the part of a guest. She barged into this imaginary situation, not looking at the girl playing hostess and brushing right past her. The teacher then entered again, this time offering her hand, looking the hostess in the eye, and saying, "Hi! It's so nice of you to invite me." She then discussed with the girls which of these two entries they preferred. Clearly it was the latter, and the students analyzed why. They each took a turn playing both hostess and guest in a variety of similar situations, and talked over the effects together.

Parents can re-enact situations like this with younger children, but for teenagers, the schools, recreation groups, and church groups are needed to do this kind of teaching. Learning disabled youngsters cannot fathom these very simple ways to make people enjoy being with them. Eye contact, a smile, a reassuring pat, a firm handshake, a pleasant

greeting, a gently phrased question, a polite interruption, a thoughtful inquiry, and sometimes a needed silence--all these are social skills that must be taught, each for its own place, one by one. Videotape machines can be enormously helpful for a young person to help him see himself as others do. The use of the absurd can also be an effective way to begin this kind of training, with the adult doing some most inappropriate and comical things. The exaggeration begins to define what is inappropriate, and from there the adult and the adolescent can move together toward understanding subtler behaviors.

The art of socialization is highly complex. Many learning disabled children have mastered it. Some have not, but they can, in time. No child has all the problems listed below, but even a few of them impede socialization.

Following is a list of problems that work against learning disabled youngsters using good judgement in social situations.

Disorder, disorganization, scatter.

Lack of impulse control (acting without thinking).

Low tolerance of frustration and need for immediate gratification.

Body and spatial problems (difficulties in judging size, shape, distance, direction).

Poor concepts of time and timing.

Perseveration (repeating an action or phrase or topic over and over again).

Difficulty in shifting from one situation to another.

Emotional lability (overreacting, moodiness, changeability).

Poor listening skills, poor memory, poor grasp of sequence (forgetting what they are doing and what they are supposed to do next).

Inability to look at what is going on and to visualize.

Giving as much weight to the most minute detail as to the key point.

Difficulty in making choices of any kind.

Concrete, literal comprehension, missing subtleties and nuances.

Egocentric outlook (the inability to put themselves in others' shoes).

Inability to relate cause and effect, and to generalize from social experiences (the inability to predict).

The following is a listing of how learning disabled youngsters demonstrate poor judgment in social situations.

Barging thoughtlessly into situations and interrupting without looking.

Having trouble taking turns.

Acting belligerent (when in reality they do not comprehend directions).

Making inappropriate remarks, gestures, actions, poorly timed responses.

Misreading the social signals given by others (not understanding facial expressions, posture of symbolic movements that indicate fear, anger, guilt, complicity, irritation, sadness, etc.).

Missing the point of what other people are doing, off target.

Letting others take advantage of them; carrying out destructive acts for others.

Blowing up at the slightest hint of criticism, tiny mistakes, postponements, or delays; overreacting to mild teasing.

Telling jokes that are not funny; not understanding the jokes, puns, riddles of others.

Picking on everything that is different from last time (appearing uncooperative and intransigent by seeing only one way to do things).

Being bossy (the need to organize others stemming from their own internal disorganization).

Planning poorly.

Quitting, running away, or making fools of themselves when they cannot explain their failure to perform competently.

Placing blame on others (denial of their own role in a situation that has some wrong).

Needing to win at all costs (this can lead to lying, cheating, destroying the game).

Need for Acceptance

Lester is desperately lonely; he would do almost anything to feel accepted and liked by other youngsters. Because of his loneliness, he is in greater danger of being led astray by others than is his fourteen-year-old neighbor, a boy who is fortunate enough

to have developed normally, with good judgment, self-confidence, and a clear understanding of right and wrong. When Les was little, other children found it was easy to take his toys. Now they find they can get his money. Where he used to give them cookies in exchange for "friendship," now he gives them money. Or he may give them alcohol or drugs, which can lead to stealing if he hasn't money of his own with which to buy them. He'll cheat, lie, tattle, take on a new friend's values and prejudices (which may be alien to his own), or he may become a "slave" to a person, following any command in order to gain friendship. He'll do anything to make a friend and to belong. Because he feels unwanted, he may be drawn to fringe groups that harbor other lonely, alienated people--religious cults or groups embracing bizarre food fads and diets. He may be drawn into vandalism or other delinquent behavior that he did not think up but for which he will invariably get caught. He may be lured into trying hard drugs, alcohol, or sex in all forms as a social route. The activity itself is not important. The warding away of loneliness and the embracing of companionship in any form is what matters.

He tends to be off balance here as in physical activities: overdoing, timing badly, judging incorrectly. Once more, he falls flat on his face and has to learn, one step at a time, how to cope with these situations. Too often he tends to retreat to the television, to become glued...or to the icebox, to become fat...to the bar, to become drunk...to the motorcycle or car, to race away...or to playing with the mother and baby next door, because he has become weary. Social clumsiness isolates the learning disabled youngster even more than his physical clumsiness. "It's not fair" is a frequent rejoinder of the learning disabled child--and it isn't.

This same lonely longing to belong, however, if channeled and trained, can draw a learning disabled adolescent into groups that can help him greatly. These can range from chess clubs to bowling teams to amateur theatrical groups. Where such groups don't exist, parents, teachers, or community organizations can create them. There is a need for group activities where learning disabled teenagers can learn the skills of daily

life and acquire the know-how and the social graces that allow them to move confidently in the grown-up world of everyday living. Teen clubs need to be a top priority among parents and teachers of learning disabled youngsters, where the emphasis is on success in socialization accomplished step by step. How to make friends, keep friends, and be a part of a group are lifetime skills that need to be taught. They are the skills that comprise socialization, which means survival.

Learning disabled adults also need clubs and groups where they can share experiences and learn from each other. Some learning disabled adults continue to need support systems. A number of professionals in this young field feel that lifetime counseling for the learning disabled adult is a top priority and should be available in every junior or community college for learning disabled adults whenever they need it.

Developing a Special Talent

Many successful learning disabled adults have had one area of special competence that allowed them to shine, to have a goal, and to build confidence. It is crucial for a learning disabled youngster to find one talent or one skill on which he can concentrate, if at all possible. Once such an interest is identified, it can be encouraged and trained by parents, teachers, and all other professionals who work with this child. If the youngster learns well by demonstration, he should have a chance to become apprenticed to somebody who is already skilled. Suppose a boy has a knack with machines; find a mechanic who will let the boy work in his garage as an assistant or pay the mechanic as you would any other tutor. Senior citizens are a great untapped resource in our society. Through church groups and interest clubs, they have a great deal that they could offer in working individually with learning disabled teenagers. Their calm manner and organization, their experience with life, and their available time can make a difference in the life of a learning disabled adolescent.

Sports can open up a whole world, even to an unathletic boy or girl. By hard work with their learning disabled child, parents can bring alive sports that they love themselves.

Step by step, they can build up an understanding and appreciation of football, baseball, basketball, golf, or almost any spectator sport. The ritual and procedure of stadium behavior can be learned and enjoyed. A learning disabled youngster with a keen interest in a sport may find purpose and satisfaction as a manager's assistant on a team--taking care of many routine but vital details, like towels and jackets, and earning the right to wear the team's uniform. He might become an expert on facts and figures concerning his favorite sport or simply have fun attending games with his father.

The learning disabled child needs a realistic view of his own strengths and capabilities as well as his weaknesses and disabilities, to make the most of what he has. Nothing is more pathetic than the person who pretends to be what is is not, who chases after impossible goals, destroying himself along the way. This is not to say that the learning disabled adolescent should settle for the lowest practical opportunities, without aiming higher. For many, a college education is possible and attainable. Junior colleges and community colleges are becoming a haven for young learning disabled adults after they leave high school. The time they gain there often give them the opportunity to mature, to find a specialty, to develop organization, discipline, and study habits that will enable them to succeed in a competitive four-year college or to hold a job. Vocational schools are the answer for others who have no particular, visible bent but who are especially good with their hands.

Originality, ingenuity, a fresh eye, and an unconventional approach have led many learning disabled youngsters into the arts. Not held back by their learning disabilities, many thrive creatively in fields like montage, cartooning, window display, filmmaking, architecture, interior decorating, ceramics, and landscaping.

Tony made a flute and learned to play it in a special class when he was fourteen, and something inside him caught fire. By sheer perseverance, he graduated from college, majoring in music. He became a first-rate musician, and today he plays in an orchestra. Tom was a hyperactive boy who annoyed his teachers by drumming his fingers on the

desk. He took up drums seriously in high school and, after he graduated, joined a band, which is now touring the country. Boats have been a source of great satisfaction and employment to some--the building of boats, sailing, and teaching these skills. To others, marine biology, oceanography, or the environmental sciences become a passion.

Too often in the past, an intelligent young person who doesn't spell well, who may be disorganized, reads with difficulty, and who does not make it to college has ended up as a short-order cook, or a grocery sacker in a supermarket, or has been relegated to some other unimaginative job that he does not do well and where he is wasted. His abilities would qualify him for many useful challenging occupations if suitable training programs existed. There is a need for systematic work-study programs in the helping professions such as hospital work, as nurses' aides or physical and recreational therapists; in day care centers and childrens' recreation programs; for work with growing plants in nurseries, plant farms, and with landscape architects; for jobs in hotels, stores, and banks.

Human Qualities

In the end, what counts are human qualities. A person's sense of himself, his feeling of comfort with himself, and thus his ease with others are what matters. How many adults do you know whose knowledge of spelling or trigonometry makes any difference to you? Does it matter how good your friend's handwriting is or how many historical facts he can recite? Is it important that your friends be very athletic plus very scholarly, as well as talented in some artistic field? The chances are that you want to be with a person you enjoy, someone with whom you have easy communication to share interests and concerns, someone who is fun and caring. You want a friend who laughs with you, not at you, who can share your worries as well as your pleasures. A friend does not have to be fashionable, but a certain amount of cleanliness, neatness, and attractiveness matter. You want someone you can count on, whose word is good, who comes through on promises, who doesn't keep score on favors given and received.

To be a good friend, to be a fine mate, to become a good parent--these are crucial goals in our society, yet we do not educate any of our young people to fulfill them. We study, we plan, and we prepare for almost everything in life except our relationships. And what do we spend our whole lives doing except relating to other human beings? Most of us pick up enough clues, by tuning into what is going on around us, to get along well with other people. But there are many among us--and a number of them are hampered by learning disabilities--who do not unconsciously absorb what happens around them and apply it to their own lives. They need to be taught these skills explicitly.

So socialization joins organization as top priorities for the learning disabled adolescent. As much as the learning disabled child needs systematic instruction in reading, spelling, math, and other academic areas, whether he will be a successful adult really revolves around socialization and organization. This is the great challenge to professionals working with the learning disabled adolescent.

Conclusion

Providing appropriate, meaningful, high quality programs in the least restrictive environment for learning disabled students is one of the most challenging tasks facing special educators today. The questions addressed in this resource paper represent an attempt by the State Department of Education to provide some suggestions and information relative to cooperative educational endeavors between regular and special educators.

The Association For Children With Learning Disabilities, Inc., believes that a learning disability is a lifetime handicap. It would be in error to think that all students with learning disabilites have only a mild transitory disorder and need only a "watered down" special education. Appropriate education in regular classes may be the least restrictive environment for some identified students yet many of the learning disabled will continue to need intense educational programs. Accordingly, we should recognize that new approaches need to be explored to better meet the needs of all students.

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